**THE RESURRECTION – NO HALLUCINATION**

The Victorian critic George Henry Lewes knew many of the celebrities of his day, although he is perhaps best known for being the ‘partner’ of the novelist George Eliot. In a penetrating essay on Dickens, he compares the novelist’s imaginative power to a kind of hallucinative experience, since Dickens ‘once declared to me that every word said by his characters was distinctly heard by him’.

Some people argue that something similar lies behind Jesus’ resurrection appearances. Indeed, some theologians have followed modern philosophers and psychologists – unhelpfully, as it seems to me – in referring to the resurrection as a ‘veridical hallucination’. This is confusing, and the theologians always have to explain that they still believe it really happened.

Several factors militate stubbornly against a full-blown hallucination theory. Jesus’ tomb was empty. His body had gone. The heavy boulder was rolled back. This could conceivably have been done by thieves or by the authorities, but why would they do this? It is implausible to suspect that the corpse had been taken by the disciples, because men do not go to their deaths for something they know to be a lie. And, unhesitatingly, they did declare that Jesus was alive, and that he took his human body, now wondrously transformed, into the next life.

That resurrected body was mysterious. It could manifest itself in the old natural way, yet it possessed wondrous new properties. Locked doors could not keep it out, or retain it behind them; by means of it, Jesus was capable of preparing a meal, lighting a fire, producing fish and bread, and then joining the disciples to consume the food. The body was palpable when he wished it to be - as with Thomas, who was invited to touch it, and to the women speeding from his tomb, as described by Matthew in 28:9. He himself stressed that he was not a ghost. *‘Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.’* He walked and conversed with Cleopas and his companion on the Emmaus road, and joined them at the meal table, only to disappear in the act of blessing the bread.

Yet the risen Lord was not always recognised; his appearance was somehow changed - as at his transfiguration. That risen body, which we are promised we shall also one day possess, was completely obedient to his will, and it served him perfectly. Time and place did not restrict it; it could be in heaven or on earth, acting as a mortal man’s body or with absolute, limitless freedom as befits God’s divine Word, the only begotten Son of the Father.

It is unsurprising that this is difficult to comprehend. After all, Jesus was unique. He was God’s agent of creation: Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. Scoffers used to refer to ‘the death of God’, an absurdity if there ever was one. It is self-contradictory to say that God can die (although Jesus’ earthly body truly passed through death). God was ultimately in control, as he always is, and he raised his Son again to the life that has no end, in his eternal and glorious kingdom. In these unparalleled times that *we* are living through, I am convinced that, despite the undoubted sufferings and deaths caused by the corona virus, God will have the last word. He certainly will not allow the human race to die out, or his purpose for mankind be thwarted, or the world to end, before he is ready. **Fr Anthony Wintle**

